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Biddle, Livingston: National Medal of Arts (1995): Correspondence 02

Livingston Biddle

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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS...

NATIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARDS

In these times of unsatisfied needs in the arts, as the Endowment is reduced in its ability to provide and generate necessary funds, it would be well to reemphasize its initial and abiding mission -- to encourage a partnership with the private community, so that excellence in the arts becomes ever more fulfilled to benefit an increasingly wider audience and participation.

How to accomplish these goals with today's reductions?

A Way to Help...

It's suggested here that consideration be given to a new means of achieving the traditional and time-proved goals as follows:

Special Recognition would be given to organizations which, under earlier circumstances, would receive an appropriate financial support, not now possible.

In my own times of service, I attended many panel meetings when at a given moment further applications from highly reputed groups simply could not be funded. It was always thus from the Endowment's beginnings. Competition has always been intense. Invariably comes a cut-off point -- always agonizing in my experience. But in those days annual budgets were increasing; there was optimism in the air.

Today that cut-off point must necessarily be reached earlier than before.

Supposing, therefore, the three applications nearest the cut-off, the three atop the list of necessary rejections, be given a special kind of recognition -- and informed that in better times their needs would indeed be better addressed. Until such time, they would receive a special notification called a:

National Excellence Award (or similar designation)

It could take the form of a special document, duly inscribed -- something special to show, with an accompanying letter from the Chairman and with the appropriate individualized words on the award itself.

And it would be accompanied by a stipend (perhaps of \$500, or \$1000 max.) -- but the same amount for all awardees.

It seems to me that such awards would:

.Underscore a caring Endowment.

.Act as special fund-raising tools.

And they could help encourage optimism, hope and energy to work for better times.

From the beginning the Endowment's "imprimatur" has been greatly significant in fund-raising. That is a fact of the Endowment's life; and it relates to the whole of the "panels of private citizen experts" process -- which because of the expertise and the numbers involved is not matched elsewhere.

My feeling is that a special award (with stipend) is more effective than a letter -- of condolence, so to speak, even though eloquently phrased. Letters, however, would continue for all concerned.

All the above is suggested as a new approach for difficult times. Certainly variations are possible.

Budget: Let's say... from all panels, the number of awards was 50 (or a max. of \$50,000).

The central benefit would lie in the recognition given to the nearly fundable, to the most deserving among those for whom support is simply not within a present budget... The panel cut-off point seems a way of deliniation.

Finally -- care should be given lest, if adopted, this suggestion be considered as a substitute in anticipation of further future downsizing. It should be clear that it is the opposite.

Best always,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Liv' with a stylized flourish at the end.

cc: the Honorable Jane Alexander